

**Should Native English-Speaking Teachers be Culturally Responsive in
English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) Contexts? Examining the Needs of
ELF Learners**

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Abstract

This opinion paper examines the cultural needs in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) classrooms. The question of the paper is whether Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) who are teaching around the globe should integrate their own culture in the classroom or be aware of local and international cultures. To answer this question, I focus solely on the English language needs of the ELF learners. The paper concludes that, against some employers' expectations, NESTs need to be trained to integrate a broader understanding of culture that is responsive to international communication.

Introduction

For a long time in the history of English Language Teaching (ELT), there had been a taken-for-granted belief that teachers who are not native speakers of English are less competent to teach or integrate culture in their English language classrooms¹. Unlike non-native speakers of a language, natives do not need to think about what is culturally appropriate and what is not and therefore they represent 'authentic' models of the target culture of the second language classroom². Some employers claim that Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) are better equipped to teach their own native culture, as they fully understand it³.

However, the fact that English is a global language implies that it should be able to accommodate the diversity of world cultures. With the recent understanding of English as a lingua franca and a representative of international and intercultural communications that might not involve native speakers of English, accepting the native speaker as ‘the’ cultural role-model in the L2 classroom should be questioned.

The needs of the English language learner in ELF contexts

The English language classroom in international contexts is supposed to prepare a global (or globalcentric) citizen, fostering common understanding of world cultures⁴. Many English language learners do not visit English-speaking countries but they actually learn the language to use it with other non-native speakers in the context of World Englishes (WEs), using their varieties that do not have to follow the native-speaker model. The needs of many ELF learners require that the teacher also respond to the Culture 1 (C 1) of his or her learners⁵.

In most cases that I have witnessed, ELF learners use English in WEs contexts. For example, ELF learners who work in companies may have to interact with Chinese exporters, so how can Culture 2 (C2) in such cases be the English language culture? If we agree that the ELF industry should emphasize the objectives of learning English and keep its eyes on the outcomes, the objective of the ELF learner in our example is not to learn much about American or British culture, but only to communicate by using the language and a ‘common’ culture of respect and politeness.

Another example is a learner who wants to work as a tour guide in his or her own country. This learner needs English to explain his or her local culture and knowing American or British cultures may not be useful to him or to her at all when the tourists

are not Americans or British. In their examination of culture in the world English as an international language (EIL), which is usually used synonymously with ELF, Shin, Eslami, and Chen argue that “there are instances in which teaching the target culture is appropriate; in other, a local culture or international culture approach might be more advantageous. A balanced combination of localised, native-speaking, and internationalized form of culture represents yet another alternative”⁶. This understanding is based on the direct needs of the learner. For learners who learn English to study abroad or immigrate to English speaking countries, being non-ELF learners, the target language culture is of higher importance than for those who are going to use English for international communications because they are not ELF learners⁷.

It is very important that we, as ELF teachers, and international employers understand that the objective of the ELF learner is not only to communicate with native English speakers. Since English is now called an international and global language; the English language teaching industry in global contexts must look at culture from a wider perspective to include its international aspects; a task that is becoming much easier with the widespread of the Internet and technology.

The NESTs and the Integration of Culture in ELF Classrooms

Therefore, in response to employers’ bias toward NESTs as models of C2, as discussed earlier, NESTs who teach ELF learners should not impose C2 in their classes but be able to understand their learners’ local culture as well as the international culture that promotes mutual respect of other cultures. In such contexts, teachers should be aware of the motivations of their learners and how they can prepare them for the job market which, as mentioned earlier, accommodates every world culture. Learning how to interact

nicely with people, respecting otherness, and responding politely to requests from clients or suppliers are all required components of cultural integration in the classroom.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although there are many reasons why NESTs should be culturally responsive in international contexts, the focus of this paper was on connecting between the teaching of culture in ELF classrooms and the future needs of the learners. Employers should realize that NESTs should be well trained to be responsive to the cultures of their ELF learners as well as be aware of the international and global culture.

Biodata

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¹ Florence Ma, L. P. (2012). Advantages and disadvantages of native-and nonnative-English-speaking teachers: Student perceptions in Hong Kong. *TESOL quarterly*, 46(2), 280-305. doi: 10.1002/tesq.21

² Wahyudi, R. (2012). Native English Speaker Teachers (NESTs) versus Non Native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs) in TESOL. In *Proceedings of 4th NELTAL Conference* (pp. 1-8).

³ Selvi, A. F. (2010). All teachers are equal, but some teachers are more equal than others: Trend analysis of job advertisements in English language teaching. *WATESOL NNEST Caucus Annual Review*, 1(1), 155-181.

⁴ Ke, I. C. (2010). Global English and world culture: A study of Taiwanese university students' worldviews and conceptions of English. *Journal of English as an International Language*, 5(8).

⁵ Al Hariri, K. (2016). Preparing the non-native-English-speaking teacher (NNEST) for the EFL classroom: A teacher trainer perspective. *Journal of Education in Black Sea Region*, 1(2), 15-24. doi:10.31578/jeps.v1i2.16

⁶ Shin, J., Eslami, Z. R., & Chen, W. C. (2011). Presentation of local and international culture in current international English-language teaching textbooks. *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*, 24(3), 253-268. doi:10.1080/07908318.2011.614694

⁷ Knapp, K. (2015). English as an international lingua franca and the teaching of international communication. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 4(1), 173-189. doi:10.1515/jelf-2015-0003

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